



## 2. Growing Parish, Expanding Church

The original Redemptorist Rule forbade parishes to be attached to houses of the Congregation, so that the priests of the community might be able to devote their attention exclusively to the work of parish missions.

Clapham has always kept the feast of the Holy Rosary, 7 October, as its patronal feast. A feast under the title of Our Lady of Victories was instituted in thanksgiving for the Christian victory over the Turks at the naval Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Two years later, the title was altered to Our Lady of the Rosary. Examples of churches dedicated to Our Lady of Victories include Sancta Maria delle Vittorie in Rome (where Bernini's famous statue of St Teresa of Avila is found), and Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris. It is probably the latter that has the closest link to Clapham. Both Fathers Lempfried and de Buggenoms, founders of the Falmouth mission, had celebrated Mass in it while visiting Paris.

### **Who were the parishioners of Clapham?**

The existing records tell little about the ordinary life of the parishioners of St Mary's. The first extant baptismal register is handwritten, the ink is often faded and not always easy to read. The next one covers the period 1856 to 1870, and records that 1,310 children were baptised in fourteen years.

A separate set of registers exists for adult baptisms. These were people who were received into full communion with the Catholic Church, in most cases receiving conditional baptism. Many of the male converts spent a few days before their reception on retreat in the monastery. The converts' book includes 2,052 names between 1853 and 1908. Not all were resident in the Clapham parish, as converts were often sent to the community for instruction or retreat. Ages of the converts vary: some are children "who have reached the age of reason" (seven years of age) and are treated as what we might term "theological adults". It is reasonable to suppose that their parents had entered the Church sometime before. Occasionally, an entire family is received at the same time. Emma Underhill, with her three children aged between seven and three, were received in 1867, even though her husband remained a Protestant. Many others, judging from their age, were probably converting in order to marry a Catholic. There is little by way of comment on individual entries. Numbers vary from year to year, from two in 1853, for example, to 118 in 1898. The numbers between 1890 and 1908 are significantly higher.

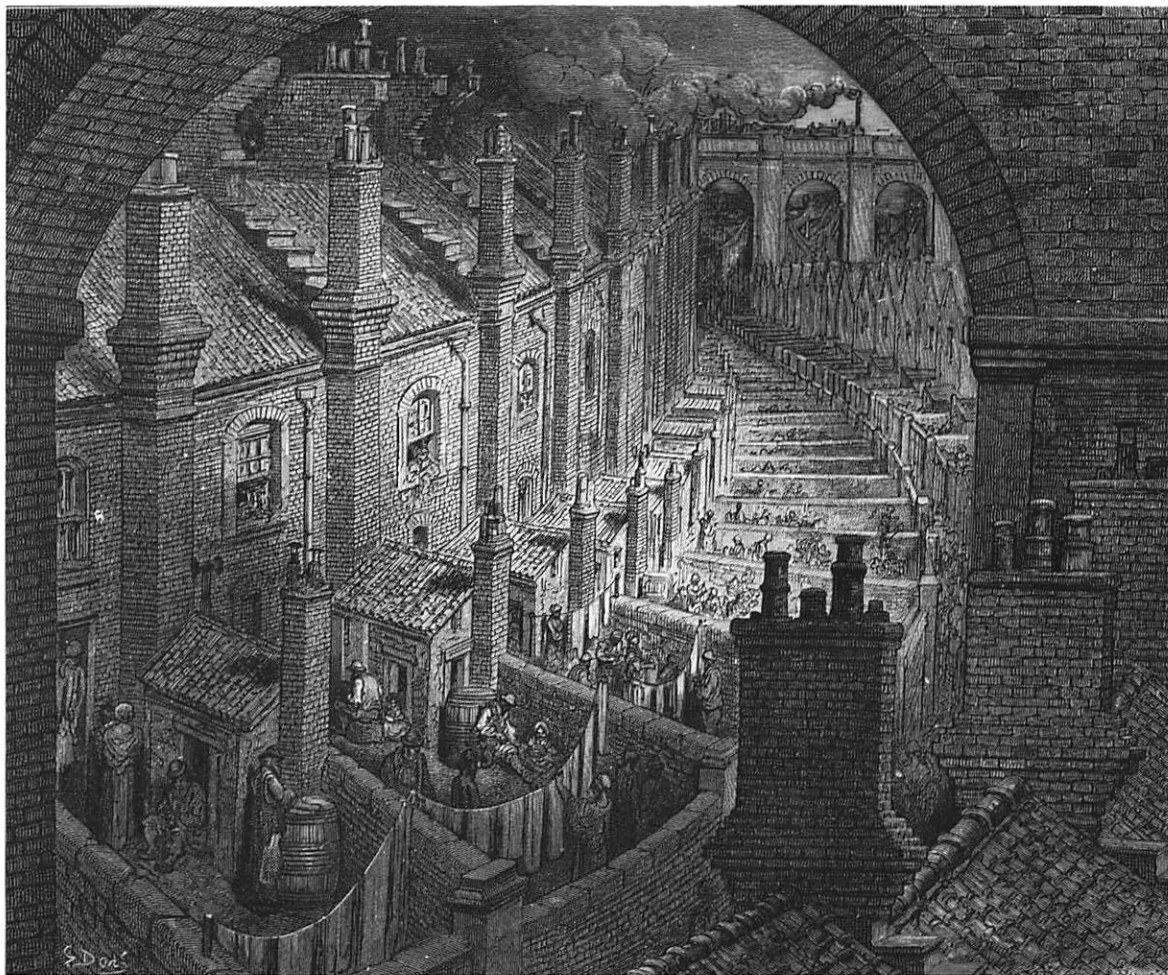
Based on the surnames of the parents and godparents of the babies baptised, it might be reasonable to assume that about half of them were the children of first generation Irish immigrants. In some cases, the German or Belgian priest performing the ceremony has had to guess at the spelling of unusual Irish surnames, which further suggests the likelihood that the parents were illiterate.

Birth in the nineteenth century was often hazardous for mothers and children. Marginal notes that the child had already received an emergency baptism at home, either by a priest or a lay-person such as a midwife, are not uncommon. In danger of death, all that was required was the simple pouring of water with the baptismal formula. If the baby survived, it was eventually brought to the church, when the other baptismal ceremonies, such as the anointing, were supplied and his or her name was formally inscribed in the baptismal register. In a number of cases (all Irish), the note records Wandsworth workhouse as the place of emergency baptism. It is reasonable to conclude that a corresponding number of healthy Irish babies were born in the workhouse. Certainly, the majority of Clapham's first Irish parishioners were struggling. One marginal note tells us that a three-year-old baby was brought all the way from Islington by his Irish Catholic father, unknown to his mother, who was not a Catholic.

Relatively affluent Catholic families also brought their children for baptism. One such was young Francis Alphonsus Bourne, who was baptised by Fr Coffin on 24 March 1861, the day after his birth. The marginal note on the entry records that he was ordained priest in St Mary's in 1884 by the man who had baptised him, now bishop of Southwark. Bourne was himself consecrated coadjutor bishop of the same diocese, afterwards elevated to Westminster in 1903 and created cardinal in 1911. The future cardinal's convert father considered himself to be fortunate to live close to St Mary's where the rector, Fr Coffin, had been a leading member of the Oxford Movement, and where the large number of priests meant that the liturgy could be carried out with a degree of splendour available in few London churches.

Much the same pattern is repeated in the marriage registers. The most common marginal note here is that a dispensation had been given for "disparity of cult", in other words, one of the spouses was not baptised. The beauty of the church probably made it an attractive place for fashionable weddings. Arthur James Plunkett of Killeen in County Meath, for example, married Elise Marie Rio whose parents lived in Clapham and belonged to the French nobility, in St Mary's. The ceremony was performed by the groom's brother, Fr William Plunkett, a member of the community. Both were sons of Lord Fingall of the Irish peerage.

## The Reality of London Life



Nineteenth Century London was a crowded, unhealthy city

The London in which St Mary's parish was begun was the London reflected in the novels of Charles Dickens, a growing metropolis plagued by disease and crime, by smoke and fog. Clapham may have still retained a certain rural charm, enhanced by its large open Common, but the city was fast encroaching on it. It was becoming a favourite residential space for people who worked in the city and who were able to travel daily on the horse-drawn omnibus system that had been expanding since its introduction in 1831. Indeed the "man on the Clapham omnibus" became the measure for the average citizen of intelligence and common sense since it was first used in a 1903 law case. When Clapham Common tube station was opened in 1900, it was the southern-most station of the London underground.

Despite its size, London lacked an adequate sewerage system until the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Thames was more or less an open sewer that stank horribly, especially in summer time. So obnoxious was the "great stink" of 1858 that pressure was brought to bear to demand a proper system of public hygiene. It was not the smell alone that was troubling, but the disease that accompanied it. In the polluted atmosphere of London, tuberculosis was common. Cholera, a disease associated today with the poorest regions of the developing world, was endemic in nineteenth-century London. The monastery chronicle, for example, notes that there was a cholera epidemic during the summer of 1854. The German artist Settegast was painting the fresco on the arch over the sanctuary at this time. In his letters to his wife, he records how impressed he was by the care the Fathers gave to the sick whenever they were called.

In a society with no welfare state, parishes were conscious of the need to care for the poor among them. Like other Catholic parishes, St Mary's had a Society of St Elizabeth of Hungary. It was composed of women of a certain social position "for the purpose of serving God in the poor". This was done by visiting the homes of the poor, maternity cases, young widows, single women and other persons not visited by the Society of St Vincent de Paul. It also befriended unemployed servant girls, collected cast-off items of linen and clothing, mending them if possible for the use of the poor. The records of the Society in the archives from 1909 to 1939 offer us snapshots of poverty in the parish. One of the earliest cases records a widow with three children: the eldest daughter is going into domestic service, while the Vincent de Paul Brothers have offered to get the two youngest children, eight and eleven years old, into a home. In another case, a pregnant woman with a diseased arm is unable to look after her baby, so the Society finds a woman to care for it, but some months later, we learn that the child has died and the woman has lost her arm. A respectable old woman (of sixty-two!) has had to leave her situation

to go into hospital. After a year, she has come out but would now like to get into the home run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. There is a hint, however, that her drinking might have contributed to the loss of her job. A widow with one child has a pension of five shillings and is unable to work due to ill-health. One of the last cases is a family with three children who are refugees from the Spanish Civil War. The Society of St Elizabeth, where possible, provided financial help, clothing and vouchers for essential foods.

### **A Growing Parish**

By 1865, the Redemptorist houses of Clapham, Bishop Eton (Liverpool) and Limerick (Ireland) were granted independence as a province. This meant that the community was now largely, but not exclusively, composed of native English speakers. The external ministry of the community was expanding. In 1866, eleven missions and two “renewals” (short parish retreats, delivered some months after a mission had been preached), six retreats to religious and nine to other groups were preached. 120 converts were received in the course of the missions, and a further seventeen were received at Clapham. There were 150 members in the Clapham confraternity and 16,216 communions were distributed in the course of the year. This was not to be taken however as a sign to the Fathers to relax their efforts.

At the annual canonical visitation in 1866, the Provincial left the following instructions:

Four times a year, all those parts of the district in which it is known that neglectful Catholics congregate, are to be carefully visited and the people seriously reminded of their obligation to receive the sacraments and send their children to Catholic schools.

It was recommended that the visits be paid especially before Christmas and Ash Wednesday.

The leader of the first Redemptorist community at Falmouth, Fr Louis de Buggenoms, had requested the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Bruges, whom he knew well, to establish a small foundation at Penrhyn in Wales. When the Redemptorists moved to Clapham, they appreciated the contribution of the Sisters and invited them to come to London. They founded their community in 1848 and within a few years the school was flourishing.



The Icon of the Mother  
of Perpetual Help

### **Our Lady of Perpetual Help Comes to Clapham**

An ancient icon of Our Lady under the title of the Mother of Perpetual Help, that was long believed to have disappeared, came to light in Rome in 1865. As it had originally been venerated in a church close to where the Redemptorists' general house now stood, they asked Pope Pius IX for it to be committed to their care. He agreed, giving them the command, "Make her known to the world." The icon was installed in the Roman Redemptorist church in 1866, which had been built from the money of Fr Douglas and designed by a Scottish architect, George Wigley. It was solemnly crowned the following year by order of the Vatican. Every Redemptorist house wanted a copy for public veneration.

Clapham's copy arrived in December 1867. Bishop Grant of Southwark presided and preached at the ceremony of installation. The veiled icon was to be carried in procession, but according to the chronicler, the church was so crowded that it was only with difficulty that the procession was able to move to St Joseph's altar, which was to be its temporary home until such time as a dedicated chapel could be found for it. The celebrations continued for a further three days of prayer and sermons on the icon and its significance.

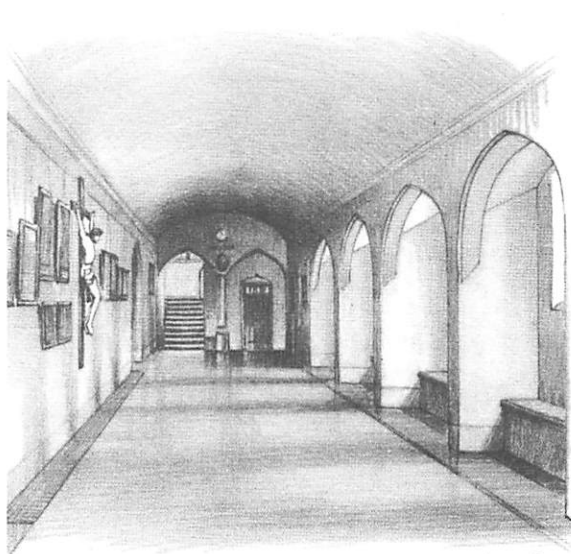
It was twenty years before the Lady Chapel was built. It was designed by the leading Catholic architect of the time, John Francis Bentley, a resident of the parish and a friend of many in the community. A note on him and his work in St Mary's will be found in a later chapter of this guide. The Lady Chapel was the first extension of the original church, and the cost of £2,000 was defrayed by a benefactor, Mrs Louis, in memory of her husband.

## **An Expanding Church**

As Clapham became drawn more into the conurbation of London, the parish continued to grow. Many of the new parishioners belonged to the rising Catholic middle classes who were finding their way into the medical and legal professions and for whom Clapham was an attractive place to live. The existing church was proving too small for the regular congregations. The monastery, already an aged building when it had been bought almost fifty years previously, was in urgent need of replacement. An ambitious plan entailed building a new monastery with accommodation for clergy and laity to come on retreat, as well as for the resident community, and extending the church by adding a transept. Bentley was chosen as the architect for both.

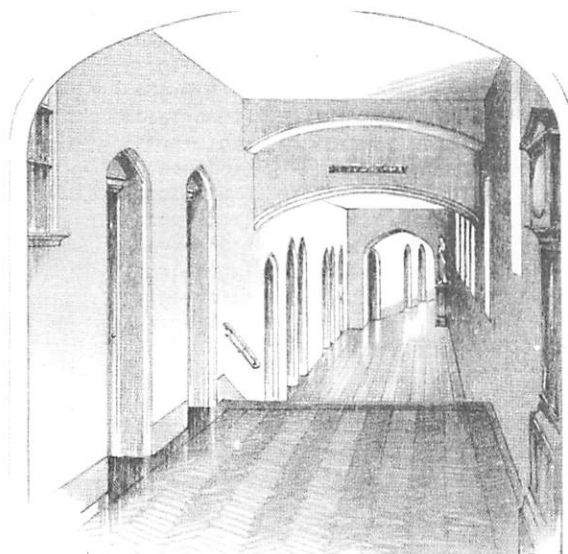
Bentley's plans required that the community be installed in the new monastery before the old building could be demolished and the ground cleared for the transept. The monastery was completed in 1891. It is built in red brick with some allusions to medieval monastic styles in the archways and stone decorations over the windows and doorways. It has been suggested that there is a Dutch or Belgian look to it, with its ornamental chimneys and red brick. It is a functional building, with little show of extravagance, but with a subdued beauty that has been described as "arts and crafts Gothic".

Work on the new transept moved briskly. Bentley carefully imitated the lines of the existing building and, where possible, reused some features, such as the two windows that gave light to the community chapel and which can be seen on the upper left side on entering. The transept also incorporated a new altar and shrine to St Joseph, and a baptistery near the entrance, with the font enclosed behind a simple iron grille. It had been suggested to Bentley that there were sufficient funds for a new font, but the architect refused, on the grounds that his children had been baptised in the existing font. This may be forgiven as a father's sentimentality, but it also respects the deep liturgical symbolism of the font as the womb of Mother Church, as is manifest in the prayers for the blessing of baptismal water at the Easter Vigil. The same font was later moved into the sanctuary area when the church was reordered after Vatican II.



THE MAIN CORRIDOR

Joseph J. Ke



ST GERARD'S CORRIDOR

Joseph J. Ke

As the church grew in size, so too did the parish. In 1903, the Catholic population was just short of 2,000 souls, including the Sisters and children in the Notre Dame convent and school. Sunday Mass attendance stood at 1,700. If this figure is accurate and includes only parishioners and not casual worshippers at St Mary's, it suggests a practice rate of over 86 per cent. It was also estimated that 1,400 (over seventy per cent) frequented the sacraments regularly.

That same year, St Mary's lost some of its territory to the new parish of St Francis de Sales and St Gertrude in Stockwell. Despite the loss of territory, a census some years later showed that the parish still had 2,400 parishioners and showed few signs of declining: the Easter Sunday congregations in 1911 came to about 2,000.

Devotion to the Redemptorist Brother, Gerard Majella, had long been promoted in Clapham. His beatification in 1893 and canonisation in 1904 greatly increased devotion to the saint, commonly regarded as the patron of pregnant women and their unborn and newly-born children. A temporary shrine had been set up in his honour, but in 1910 it was replaced by a chapel. Designed by Osmund Bentley, its proportions and style were intended to match his father's Lady Chapel in the opposite aisle.

## The First World War

War was declared on 6 August 1914. It was decided to end the school summer holidays prematurely that year in order to keep the children off the streets!

The German invasion of Belgium a few days previously had triggered Britain's declaration of war against Germany. Within a few days, the first Redemptorists began to arrive as refugees from Belgium. One of them, Brother Walter Esdaile, was a professed student of the English province who was studying in Belgium. With his companions, he had left the house of studies, as the German invasion was imminent. As a British citizen, he was in greater danger, so they parted company and he made his way to London via Ostend, with no luggage but the clothes he was wearing. By November, some sixteen Belgian Redemptorists were living in English communities. In some cases, they were accompanied by family members who had also fled. The following month, eight students arrived, who were sent to the student house at Perth, but they had to return home for military service.

Within weeks of the war's beginning, volunteers for the chaplaincy service were being sought, especially among the religious orders. About a dozen English Redemptorists, and a similar number from Ireland (then still part of the United Kingdom) volunteered. Several, like Fr David Ahearne, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), were decorated for bravery. Two others lost their lives. Fr Bernard Kavanagh was shot by a Turkish sniper on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem in December 1917 and Fr Charles Watson died in Baghdad the following July. Fr Watson had earlier survived for three days drifting in an open boat in the Mediterranean, when the ship in which he was travelling was torpedoed.

Throughout the war years, Masses were celebrated for the young men of the parish who had fallen in action. The first was on 2 December 1914, for John McKenzie, a former altar boy who was an officer in the London Scottish Regiment. The most public requiem was celebrated on 23 June 1917 for Major Willie Redmond, the Irish Nationalist MP, whose London home was in the parish and who had been married in the church thirty-one years earlier. His catafalque (a coffin-shaped structure used in a celebration of Requiem Mass when the body is not present) was draped with both the Union flag and the flag of the Irish Volunteers. Most of the Irish members of parliament and many others attended. At the end of the service, the "Dead March", "Let Erin Remember", and "God Save Our Gracious King" were played on the organ.



Grave of Fr Bernard Kavanagh in the Commonwealth War Cemetery, Jerusalem



War Memorial, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott

By September 1917, the war moved closer to home with a one-hour bombing raid on London that killed fifteen people and wounded seventy-three. The early warning and all-clear were primitive in the extreme: when a raid was threatening, police constables rode through the area on their bicycles blowing their whistles, while the all-clear was given by scouts driven through the area and blowing two notes on a bugle!

To commemorate the dead of the parish, a War Memorial Cross designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, a leading Catholic architect, was dedicated in December 1920.

### **Still expanding**

The growth of the parish showed no signs of diminishing. Since additional Sunday Masses did not solve the problem, a further extension to the church seemed inevitable. The logical thing would have been to match the south transept by building another on the opposite side, but the closeness of the houses on the front of the Common made this impossible. Two properties were acquired next door to the church on Clapham Park Road, and the architect George Bernard Cox of Birmingham drew up a plan to extend St Gerard's chapel by adding another aisle.

Cox's plans for the church included the removal of the organ and choir from the gallery over the main door and their relocation in the chapel of St Alphonsus near the sanctuary. A place would then have to be found for a new chapel of St Alphonsus. It was decided to relocate it near the entrance under the tower. The work was to be undertaken by Holloway Brothers for £5,000. Work began in March 1929 and proceeded so rapidly that by the following March Cardinal Bourne, a former parishioner and now archbishop of Westminster, was able to come to bless the new extension.

## War Again

By the late 1930s, the monastery chronicler noted that war once more seemed inevitable. As early as March 1938, the cellars were “being cleaned and whitewashed with a view to making them anti-gas shelters (so much talk of ‘war’)”, and a visiting Redemptorist passing through Germany reported the change of mood in that country. A Canadian Redemptorist, Bishop Gerald Murray, for example, told of how, when he had celebrated Mass in Cologne cathedral and had innocently asked a priest how things were in Germany, he was taken aside and warned not to ask questions like that again, as both of them could easily find themselves in a concentration camp. At the end of August 1939, the rector requested all visiting Redemptorists staying in the house to return to their home provinces. A week later, war was declared.

Once again, there was a request for chaplains for the forces. The local schools were evacuated and some of the Redemptorists were asked to accompany the children and teachers to the remote country districts where they were billeted, and where priests were in short supply. The community acquired its first radio to follow the war news and receive whatever public announcements were made.

In June 1940, the first chaplain to have served in Dunkirk briefly visited the community, still wearing battle dress, and gave a vivid account of his escape from France. “He directed a convoy personally on one occasion,” the chronicler recorded, “escaping narrowly from being ambushed by enemy tanks, enduring days of unrelenting bombing at the place of embarkation. All his kit was left or was destroyed.”

The mood in the country was so bleak that the rector gave instructions as to what was to be done in the event of a civil evacuation. The Blessed Sacrament, in both church and community oratory, was to be consumed, and the holy oils distributed among the Fathers. If possible, each priest was to take a chalice. The church and monastery were to be handed over to the military, if required. Everyone was to keep a small suitcase ready and when the time came, each would be given a sum of money. If at all possible, everyone was to make his way to Hawkstone, the house of studies. As this was a remote house in Shropshire with a farm attached, it was probably the safest place available.

Despite the hardship and the frequent air raids, during which much time was spent in the cellars, morale in both parish and community remained high. “Our people are wonderfully brave,” noted the chronicler, “and in spite of sleepless nights and danger by day, the church has been well attended.” Throughout the war, Clapham



Alphonsus Liguori, Founder  
of the Redemptorists

was a place for spiritual and human renewal for chaplains, no matter what army they served. Each month, it offered a retreat day to as many British chaplains as were free to avail of it.

The liturgy continued to be celebrated to a very high standard. A young parishioner with an Oxford degree in music, George Malcolm, had been appointed director of the choir and organist before the war. When he was called up, he was appointed head of an RAF band based in London. Somehow, he managed to arrange his leave to coincide with the liturgical needs of Clapham, especially at Holy Week and Christmas. From 1944 until 1949, Archbishop Amigo of Southwark came to Clapham to consecrate the holy oils on Maundy Thursday, as St George's, his cathedral, had been severely damaged in a bombing raid. After the war, George Malcolm found a full-time post as director of music at Westminster Cathedral and as his career developed, he became well known for his work in early music and recordings, especially with the harpsichord.

By Easter, 1945 the end was in sight as the blackout ended and Germany surrendered. A lasting memorial of the war in St Mary's was the weekly novena in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. It had been introduced to the Redemptorist church in Belfast by an American Redemptorist chaplain in 1942 and proved to be an outstanding success in those dark days. The provincial, Fr John Charlton, asked for it to be introduced in all the houses of the province in thanksgiving for their protection during the war.

An extraordinary act of fraternal kindness and reconciliation was performed by the English province immediately after the war. Fr Charlton opened up negotiations with the Allied Control Commission to obtain permission for the students of the German province to come to England to continue their studies. Many of these young men had been conscripted into the Wehrmacht during the war and were returning to religious life in very difficult conditions. The first group of thirteen, with their teachers of theology, arrived in September 1947 and were brought to Hawkstone, where they lived, prayed, studied and played in community alongside their English Brothers.

## **A Hundred Years and Changing**

In June 1948, the community celebrated its centenary. In preparation for it, some work of maintenance and restoration of the church took place under the direction of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. It included the restoration of some windows in the Lady Chapel that had been shattered during war-time bombing. The community chapel also received attention. The Gothic artists, Ninian Comper and his son Sebastian, supervised the restoration of Bentley's reredos, and depicted on it the three Redemptorist saints, Alphonsus, Clement and Gerard, two of whom (Clement and Gerard) had been canonised since Bentley's time. Bentley's decorated ceiling was left in its original condition but carefully cleaned.

In the early 1950s, the parish seemed to be in a flourishing state. According to the annual returns for the years 1952 to 1955, baptisms outnumbered funerals (796 to 142) and marriages in which both parties were Catholic numbered 207, with a further eighty-nine mixed marriages. There are no figures for Sunday Mass attendance, and the number of communions distributed (255,000) is only a very rough indicator, since it includes daily Masses and other special occasions.

The national background of parishioners was also changing. A quick survey of the baptismal register for the period 1949–1955 suggests that, while the English and Irish names that had figured in the earlier registers still remained to the fore, there was now a substantial number of Italian and Eastern European, and particularly, Polish names – nearly fifteen per cent of the total. Many of these baptisms seem to have been done by a chaplain to the Polish community, so it is not always clear whether the family was resident in St Mary's parish or not. It represents, however, an increasing diversity within the Catholic Church in England.

Minor changes were altering the ordinary rhythms of Catholic life. When fasting from midnight was a condition for the reception of Holy Communion, most communicants attended early morning Masses. Changes in the eucharistic fasting regulations in 1958 reduced the fast to three hours (eventually to one). Sunday Mass times were hourly, from 7 am until the High Mass at 11 am: there was one more at 12.15 pm and the final Mass of the day at 5.30 pm. On weekdays, Mass was at 6.30 am, 7 am, 7.30 am, 8.45 am and 9.30 am. The Second Vatican Council, beginning in 1962, introduced even greater changes in the manner in which Mass was celebrated. The most important change was a shift from the exclusive use of Latin to the language of the people. The unintended result was that many aspects of life in St Mary's changed almost overnight, including change in a musical tradition that had been in place since the church was opened.

The Council also brought about changes in the relationship with other Christian denominations. The rector, Fr Anthony Freeman, was invited to preach at Holy Trinity Church on the Common in November 1965 and the annual celebration during the week of prayer for the unity of Christians becomes a fixed point in the churches' year. There was much excitement when the BBC asked St Mary's to host a service to be recorded in advance. In February 1966, Fr Freeman presided at a service at which the preacher was the distinguished German Redemptorist theologian, Fr Bernard Häring. It was broadcast a month later to the delight of the community.

### **Who are our parishioners?**

A detailed study of social change in the parish of St Mary is well beyond the limits of this guide. However, a brief survey of the baptismal registers provides a general impression of the parents who brought their babies for baptism in the church. Several words of caution are essential, however. First of all, it is not always possible to tell the ethnic background of a person from how they spell their name. Secondly, names that look or sound traditionally British or Irish may be borne by people of, say, Canadian, Australian or Caribbean origin, just as people with Spanish or Portuguese-sounding names might just as likely come from Cape Verde or Goa in India.

With these reservations in mind, a probe of the baptismal registers indicates that St Mary's in the last quarter of the twentieth century became less homogenous than it had been even twenty years previously. While English and Irish names still accounted for sixty per cent of baptisms in 1977 and Eastern Europeans for almost seven per cent, more than ten per cent of the names were now of African origin. Another probe in the opening years of the twenty-first century (2004), showed firstly that the number of baptisms had declined (seventy-four against one hundred and thirty-two or fifty-six per cent). Although British and Irish names remained to the fore, the percentage had declined (fifty-three per cent), while the percentage of African names had risen sharply (twenty-five per cent).

Change of that sort was to be the norm for the rest of the twentieth century and into the first two decades of the twenty-first. It has been estimated that the members of St Mary's parish have about forty languages, either as native speakers or having learned them through their parents.

## Major Church Restoration

The changes introduced into the celebration of the liturgy, such as greater participation of the laity, prayers and readings in the language of the people and indeed, a fresh understanding of the significance and importance of the celebration of the Eucharist in the life of the parish, made a thorough renewal of the church, especially of the sanctuary area, imperative.

Work was begun in September 1984 and continued until the following June. It was so intensive that the church could only be used at weekends, and even then with some inconvenience. Weekday Masses and other services were held in the large parlour of the monastery. While not ideal, it had some benefits, especially in deepening the relationship between priests and people.

The first major task entailed the removal of the altar rails separating the sanctuary from the nave to enlarge the sanctuary area. A permanent free-standing altar was installed to replace the temporary altar that had been in place since the introduction of the revised rite of Mass in the late 1960s. It is in keeping with the style of the church, as it was taken from the chapel of St Alphonsus. Modifications to the pulpit enabled it to be used as the ambo, or place for the proclamation of the word of God from scripture during the liturgy.

The sanctuary furnishings were completed by the transfer of the baptismal font from the baptistery at the rear of the transept. One of the theological results of the Second Vatican Council was the recognition of the sacrament of baptism as the entry of every believer into the depths of the mystery of Christ and with it a share in Christ's priesthood. The traditional place of the baptistery, close to the entrance to the church, stressed its place as a *liminal* sacrament, a "rite of the threshold", at which usually only members of the baby's family were present. Its present position enables baptism to be celebrated in a more communal context in the presence of the whole parish community. The ideal time for this is the Easter Vigil, or, as often happens, during the celebration of a Sunday liturgy. The font is the one originally designed for the church by Wardell, but carefully cleaned and restored. To create space for the font, the statue of Our Lady in its shrine had to be raised somewhat. Finally, as an aid to security, the grille separating the choir and organ area and sanctuary was removed and placed at the top of the aisle near the transept. This allowed the transept to be closed off from the rest of the church as a matter of security while still permitting the faithful to pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

